



English and IT



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As a Computer Studies lecturer at the Institute for Tourism Studies, Macau, I often find that college students have difficulties in understanding IT terminologies in English. Macao students do possess basic IT skills, and indeed the younger generations are fond of computer technology and gadgets. Local students' exploration of the IT field, however, is often obstructed by the limitation in their English proficiency. Most of our incoming freshmen have graduated from high schools where Chinese is the medium of instruction. In addition, with the increasing popularity of software localization, computer programs in Chinese edition are everywhere, making some people believe that it may not be necessary to learn computer-related topics with the use of the English language.

I fully agree that the ability to search for information in Chinese on the Internet is definitely a big asset. However, I also remind my students that they should not ignore the English databases, which contain an extraordinary wealth of information

in almost every field of studies. Though convinced, some of them think that learning IT stuff in English can be quite difficult and intimidating. My role is to give them more confidence and help them overcome such fear. The long-term goals I would like to attain are as follows:

- 1) To bridge the gap between IT and English;
- 2) To train up students so that one day they will become can-do, can-talk and can-write persons;
- 3) To get students prepared to communicate in English with the international communities (e.g. foreign IT experts, system vendors) whenever computer-related topics are under discussion.

In July, I was invited to be a guest lecturer, teaching two 1-hour sessions, on two different days, to interested incoming freshmen for the Summer English Course. There were only 11 students who enrolled in this course. It was the first time my college had sectioned a sub-topic, called 'IT in English', off the summer course. A 1-hour session was held in the classroom and the remaining hour was spent in the computer lab, thus striking a





balance between the theoretical part and the practical one. I conversed with the students in English and Cantonese, interchangeably, so that they would not miss any important information I intended to impart. We started with something very simple: I told them not to say something like ‘open or close the computer’. Instead, they should say ‘turn on or turn off the computer’. Then I covered the terminologies in computer basics, such as ‘central processing unit’, ‘microprocessor’, ‘peripherals’, and the like. Moreover, I covered the basics of multilingual text processing, particularly on the western European letters with accent marks. Words such as ‘résumé’, ‘cliché’ and ‘façade’ can be found in a decent English dictionary, and the proper way of rendering the texts on the screen was shared with the students. Last but not least, basic terminologies used in digital photography were introduced with the use of a simulation program: <http://camerasim.com/apps/original-camerasim/web/>.

In the computer lab, students were given time to practise what they had learned early on in the classroom. Students were particularly fond of using the digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera simulator, and I encouraged them to operate it in the manual mode. My advice is: Feel free to make

mistakes, and we learn from mistakes. This philosophy applies to the use of the digital camera simulator. One of the common requests from them was: ‘Sir, please say it in Chinese’. And sometimes I did speak Cantonese to explain more difficult concepts, such as aperture, f-number and depth of field. If not, they would quickly lose their attention and interest. Finally, a short writing quiz (in multiple-choice format) was administered to test students’ understanding of computer basics (in English, of course). Most of them found it difficult due to the lack of English vocabulary. The completion of the two 1-hour sessions has given me a clear picture of the weaknesses of the new students, and I have decided to work harder to seek solutions to their problems.

